



Dark Ages America: The Final Phase of Empire

Morris Berman

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In *Dark Ages America*, the pundit Morris Berman argues that the nation has entered a dangerous phase in its historical development from which there is no return. As the corporate-consumerist juggernaut that now defines the nation rolls on, the very factors that once propelled America to greatness—extreme individualism, territorial and economic expansion, and the pursuit of material wealth—are, paradoxically, the nails in our collective coffin. Within a few decades, Berman argues, the United States will be marginalized on the world stage, its hegemony replaced by China or the European Union. With the United States just one terrorist attack away from a police state, Berman's book is a controversial and illuminating look at our current society and its ills.

Dark Ages America: The Final Phase of Empire Details

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From Reader Review Dark Ages America: The Final Phase of Empire for online ebook

Mark Fallon says

Berman writes that America has begun to enter a "Dark Ages" like those experienced by Europe at the end of the Roman Empire. Interesting read.

While I'm also a cynic, I don't agree with Berman that we've gone by any "turning point". Since the 1980s, I've read books from the Right and the Left, that America will soon follow the fate of Rome.

The American century is coming to a close, and that's okay. It's not the end of America.

Jeff Lacy says

This is my second time through this extraordinarily robust book that details the United States' march toward imperialism, the management and attainment of which will be the country's demise, according to Berman. Well and carefully sourced, Berman writes about how the US economic policy drives its foreign policy; how our foreign policy has become less of diplomacy and more on militarism, thus stretching our forces soon too thin to deal with all responsibilities. Berman reminds us of the legal governments and duly elected officials the US overthrew like the popularly elected prime minister Mossadegh of Iran because he wouldn't play ball with the oil industry. Also despicable is the US role in the overthrow of the governments of Chile and Guatemala causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people. But also edifying is how the Carter administration baited the Soviets to invade Afghanistan because they feared Islam's influence in their satellites. The US spent billions each year in military supplies and training to the Afghans. When the Soviets pulled out, the US pulled out. A million Afghans dead, 3 million wounded, and several more millions displaced and turned into refugees; about half of the population. Gratifying to read the truth about events in history not given from the perspective of the victor. As observed: our terrorist, their freedom fighter. An objective disinterested observation that is documented soundly is nicely received to the curious and skeptical reader of current affairs.

Ron Davidson says

Brilliant observations of the state of the United States in the twenty-first century, with the prognosis of its coming collapse. The author describes a nation where a "Manichean-imperial" Cold War mentality continues to rule its foreign policy, where tribalism is overtaking secular rationalism in thought and culture, and where ignorance is increasingly seen as a virtue. I am looking forward to his third volume in the series, "Why America Failed."

Brian Ayres says

Most American do not want to read Morris Berman's conclusions about the fate of the United States, but I believe every American needs to understand Berman's perspective. Unfortunately, we are either too self-indulged or ignorant to recognize that America is not what we think we are or probably what we want to be.

Berman does something in this book that few of us are willing to do and that is use introspection to dissect the problems that our individualistic nature has brought. Our militaristic/consumeristic nature has left us without a moral center and direction. Berman reflects on the American century (20th) and what led up to the events of 9/11 and after.

It will make you mad but also make you think and eventually start to understand that Berman is on to something. Our culture (if we ever had one) is in decline, whether we want to admit it or not.

Vince Darcangelo says

<http://archive.boulderweekly.com/0420...>

This review originally appeared in the BOULDER WEEKLY

The End of Empire

Historian Morris Berman outlines the fall of the American Empire in Dark Ages America

by Vince Darcangelo

Morris Berman's *Dark Ages America: The Final Phase of Empire* probably won't make anyone's Best Books for the Beach list this summer. Let's just say it doesn't have a happy ending—or beginning or middle. What *Dark Ages America* does have is a heavy helping of facts and commentary concerning the modern-day United States—and the news isn't good. Berman offers a hard, honest look in the mirror many Americans aren't willing to take, declaring that America's global supremacy has reached its end.

Putting us in historical context, Berman draws comparisons between 21st-century America and the latter days of the Roman Empire, concluding that America is entering a dark age that will reduce us to second- or third-rate status by 2040, and that it is too late to reverse course.

A cultural historian, Berman first garnered attention with his 2000 book *The Twilight of American Culture*, in which he predicted that America would soon come under attack as a counter-response to our corporate- and military-driven global policies. In *Dark Ages America*, Berman says that we've yet to learn the lessons of 9/11 and have set a course for cultural collapse and global irrelevance. He does so by discussing the moral decay of American culture, the blundering invasion of Iraq, the near-comical political missteps of the Bush administration, and an in-depth exploration of America's global policies in the 20th century, examining our postwar rise and our post-Vietnam fall.

Vince Darcangelo: What was the motivation for writing *Dark Ages America*, and what sort of response do you hope the book elicits?

Morris Berman: I never expected to write it. I had written *The Twilight of American Culture*, and it appeared 15 months before 9/11... After 9/11, something was staring at me so obviously. In *Twilight*, I had done a comparison of the contemporary United States and Rome in the late-empire period. I compared the two in terms of structural factors that were doing each civilization in and arguing that they were the same factors.

But there was one point of comparison that I completely overlooked, and that became apparent only after 9/11—that was that Rome was invaded and then fought a long war of attrition that was finally lost. That's what's happening to us. There is no way we're going to defeat terrorism. It's an elusive technique. How can you defeat terrorism?

Not that al Qaeda can win, but they've got lots of time and lots of anger. They're going to keep doing what they're doing, and we're going to keep disintegrating.

There was the motivation. As far as my guess of what difference it will make, I would say none at all... I expect to be vilified and ignored.

VD: Which would you prefer?

MB: There is this saying that bad press is better than no press. I don't know if that's true. Part of the problem of being vilified is that it usually involves a distortion.

VD: If what you're saying is true and there's nothing we can do about it, shouldn't I be stockpiling weapons for the coming Dark Age instead of reading this book?

MB: The question is what you would use the weapon on. Maybe we should just shoot ourselves. In *Twilight* I talked about the one thing people could do was cultural preservation... I saw that as the only solution, but it's not really a solution. When finally the only thing that can be done is what individuals can do, that means the system has completely broken down. Our problems are structural, and if problems are structural, then the solutions have to be structural. That's Sociology 101. Individual solutions are nice, but they're not solutions, they're responses. It would be nice if people preserved things, but I don't believe there's a hope in turning this situation around. It's not a question of whether optimism is good and pessimism is bad. It's a question of, alright, if you don't believe what I'm saying when I say there is no way of turning things around, show me the levers of social change, point to them, tell me how this is gonna happen.

And don't point to the Democratic Party, because the Democratic Party is intellectually bankrupt and politically impotent. Don't talk to me about Hillary, for God's sake. She's rattling the sabers against Iran. What a joke. The Democratic Party has essentially bought into the Republican Party. We saw that during the Clinton years; he was just a Republican in Democratic clothing. The choice between the Republicans and Democrats is the choice between empire and empire-lite.

We do not have a large section of this country up in arms. They just aren't. They may give Bush a low approval rating, but the truth is that if we were winning the war in Iraq his approval rating would be very high. It's not a moral objection or a political objection—most Americans have no understanding of the war in Iraq; they don't even understand what happened except that it didn't work out well. We're in a situation where we can torture people. To my knowledge, we're the first modern nation that has made torture legal. On top of that, we put the guy who legalized it head of the Department of Justice. George Orwell move over. This is surreal.

And Americans aren't upset about that. They're not upset about Abu Ghraib. I would even argue that Bush

got reelected because of Abu Ghraib, not in spite of it. It's not like Americans are upset that people can be detained indefinitely without trial and the right to an attorney. They're not upset that the NSA is spying on them. I don't know what it would take to get the American people upset. You could probably herd Iraqis into gas chambers and Americans would say, "Gee, we shouldn't be doing that." The days of Vietnam protests are definitely not here. We don't have a similar situation. We don't have a public that's aware, outraged or even upset. We have a public that basically is drugged, apathetic and interested in shopping.

VD: In the book you say that America "may be only one more terrorist attack away from a police state." Should this occur, how do you think the American public would respond? Do you think people would have this moment of recognition that they were complicit in the erosion of civil liberties that permitted the institution of a "police state"?

MB: I don't think so. After all, there's a large section of statistics about American awareness, including American attitudes toward the erosion of civil liberties. Something like a third are opposed to the Bill of Rights. I have to say this is true even of people that are very intelligent... The truth is that very bright people in large numbers voted for George W. Bush, supported the war and continue to think that he's even wise. And these are quite intelligent people. You have to ask how is that happening. There's something going on with this enormous blind spot that comes out of fear and a preconceived framework and so on. It's not like people are turning around and saying there's something horribly wrong, we're on the wrong track. When you have bright people supporting these policies and the erosion of civil liberties and so on, the comparison, it's a bit of a strain, but 10 percent of the Nazi party held Ph.Ds. This is not merely about the ignorance or stupidity of the American people in terms of a blue-collar ignorance of the Bill of Rights or something like that. It's bright people saying that this is OK. What could be more powerful in terms of digging ourselves into a grave? So when I say we might be one terrorist attack away from a police state, it seems pretty obvious because we're going to respond by rallying around repressive policies, not by saying that somehow we're exacerbating the whole problem. Even bright people are going to say that. I don't see what hope there is.

After all, after 3/11—when 200 people were killed in the bombings of Madrid—three days later there was an election and they voted out Aznar, who backed Bush, and they voted in a socialist government. This is what I call an intelligent populace.

VD: Do you think that all this could get so awful that it could lead to a second American Revolution?

MB: Yeah, I think it would, but if a revolution occurs in the United States, it can only happen from the Right. It can't happen from the Left. We don't have a tradition of that... It's not like we have this enlightened public. We're not like Europe. We don't have their understanding of things. Americans don't make those kinds of connections; we're not trained historically. In order to understand what's going on right now with the American Empire, you have to figure out—and this is the crucial point—that 9/11 did not emerge out of a political vacuum. It had a history. We did certain things over a long period of time in the Middle East and to Arab people. Since they could never get a hearing, finally that's what occurred. That doesn't justify the death of 3,000 civilians—I'm not saying that. But how do you justify the death of a half million Iraqi children over the sanctions? How do you justify the deaths of 100,000 Iraqis now? The butchery that we've visited upon that nation, what they did to us was nothing compared to what we've done to them, but Americans don't make those kinds of connections.

It was the same thing with the Ayatollah Khomeini revolution. After all, we put the Shah in power in 1953. That regime was brutal; it tortured people. We supplied the torture equipment and the torturers and everything else. Then the American people, when that revolution takes place and they take our hostages, instead of the American people saying, "Well, what would you expect?" They react with horror and outrage

and their feelings are hurt. This is really bright. Boy, that's really thinking historically.

When I say hopeless, I'm talking hopeless. How many books have I read? *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam. There's so many that have shown that the nation's going to hell in a basket, let me give you the data, and then in the last 10 pages somehow they pull a rabbit out of a hat. I mean, optimism is a great thing, but if it's not based in reality it's called stupidity. My question to Putnam or any of those folks is, well, that's great, but show me the mechanism of how that's going to change. Show me who it is. In order for that to happen, Americans have to make certain types of connections. And to sit around and say the people that precipitated 9/11 are simply evil and insane, this is not an analysis. We're not going to have that analysis. It's not going to happen.

VD: What's interesting to me is that you look at Jimmy Carter and his role in current events. While you applaud some of the stuff that he did, you point out in the book that even he made diplomatic errors, in particular the Carter Doctrine in 1980 that started the military buildup in the Persian Gulf. You attribute both 9/11 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq to Carter and his response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. If the most levelheaded president of my lifetime can screw up this badly, then what hope is there? Carter was the alternative. What alternative is left?

MB: Yeah, it's a tragic story. I have to tell you, if there's one person I'd like to sit down and have a beer with, it's Jimmy. I wonder what's in his mind in the sense that he was the person who really understood that we were causing our problems. The whole business about spiritual malaise and soul searching and having to cut back on energy and how we were engaged in human-rights violations, he saw it all. And then, under the pressure of losing popularity and the influence of [Carter's National Security Advisor] Zbigniew Brzezinski—who, after all, is a Pole who hated the Soviet Union—the Carter Doctrine emerged. Not only that, Brzezinski, in 1998, did an interview in Paris in which he admitted that he and Carter started training the Muhjadeen planning to draw the Soviet Union into Afghanistan six months before they invaded. They set a trap for them. 9/11 is the blowback from Carter's policies. What an incredible irony.

The real problem is that we've never been able to get out of the Cold War mentality. As much as Carter tried, he couldn't do it. He couldn't see that what the Soviet Union was doing with Afghanistan was a defensive move against the Arab world, which we then, of course, got into later on.

So it's very, very hard to break that grip of this Cold War belief that there's this great evil out there and our goal is to combat it. It's now quite clear from KGB documents that have been opened up that the Soviet Union was risk-averse. They were not interested in engaging us. We were the ones goading. In fact, their greatest fear was Germany, not the United States. That whole war is now being rewritten. When I see in the National Security Statement of 2002, written by Condoleezza Rice, when I see her writing that during the Cold War we faced a risk-averse adversary, this is a statement that could never have been uttered during the Cold War. Now it's OK to say it because we have replaced the enemy with another one—and this one, of course, is different and completely black and dark and horrible. We've always got to have a Hitler.

VD: It would appear that the Cold War was largely an invention designed to maintain the U.S. and U.S.S.R. as superpowers. However, this battle of gestures led to proxy wars, such as Afghanistan, that mobilized the Arab world, in turn creating a fervent enemy that is real.

MB: Finally, it was a self-fulfilling prophecy. That's essentially what really happened. I'm not saying to our readers that I think 9/11 was imaginary or that it didn't occur. I'm saying that finally you do enough crummy things to a certain segment of the world and, you know what, they're going to get angry.

VD: Going back to Jimmy Carter for a moment, you quote historian Gaddis Smith regarding Carter, saying that he failed "because he asked the American people to think as citizens of the world with an obligation toward future generations." You then ask, rhetorically, who really failed, Jimmy Carter or the American people. Looking at that moment in U.S. history—that hiccup of reason and perceived failure in U.S. diplomacy—do you think this was the point at which America was lost? Was Carter our last shot of getting out of that Cold War mentality?

MB: I think so. If we wanted to think not solely in terms of personality but in structural terms, George Modelska, a political scientist, wrote a book *Long Cycles in World Politics*. He distinguished in every civilization four phases. The final phase, the serious bit of decline, he assigned to the period 1971-1975. What he really said was in 1971 you had the repeal of Bretton Woods, and that was the launching of finance capitalism—in other words globalization really took off at that time. The second thing that occurred was Vietnam, which bled us incredibly—not only morally, but it cost roughly two-thirds of a trillion dollars in 1967 dollars. That was so debilitating to us, and we lost the war on top of it.

It was only at a point like that, where we were so weakened, that the patient is willing to turn to the therapist when they're about to have a nervous breakdown. That's what happened to the United States. By 1974 you had [Sen.] Frank Church doing all those hearings about all the crummy things the CIA was doing. There was Watergate. There was a crisis of nerve. Then Jimmy comes along from a Christian point of view that I admire. Bush sits around reading the gospel of death. Jimmy Carter's kind of Christianity was not necessarily turn the other cheek, but that the world was more complicated than just the enemy being out there. In classic terms, original sin exists across the board. What's ours? He really wanted us to do some soul searching. By 1976, when he got elected, I think we needed that. The American people were willing to listen to someone who was talking in those terms.

The only problem is that's to swim against the tide of American history. Our whole history, from the revolution, has been posited about defining ourselves in terms of opposition. It was about not being someone else. There's a problem with that. If you're going to define yourself in terms of what you're not, in a certain sense you're never going to figure out who you are. That's the Achilles heel in American history, that we don't know. As a result you're always going to be nervous, you're always going to be on edge, and you're always going to be projecting the problem outward. Jimmy comes along at the right time and says lets not look outward and look at ourselves. For a couple years we were willing to do that, but it was something so out of step with the rest of American history that it couldn't be sustained.

Then finally you had the Hollywood version of what the future of America would be in the person of Ronald Reagan... He weaved a story, a "Morning in America" and how great it was going to be. It was based on no reality whatsoever, and that's exactly what people wanted to hear. They took the Hollywood version, and we're living the consequences of that now. All the vilification of George W. Bush is entertaining—and I'm certainly willing to pitch in and help—but the truth is that Bush didn't come out of nowhere any more than 9/11 came out of nowhere. We have a history too. It takes a nation of ignorance and violence to produce a president like Bush.

VD: You state at the end of Chapter Four that for us to reverse course "requires a grace, a flexibility and an imagination" that you believe Americans don't have. What do you think it would take for Americans to acquire this grace, flexibility and imagination?

MB: Well, in a dramatic sense, an act of God, because it's not going to happen. To take the examples of two nations that were on a supremely self-destructive course—Germany and Japan in the '30s and '40s—what it took to get them to turn around was that they were utterly and totally destroyed...

I don't believe that al Qaeda is going to destroy us. They're going to erode us, but it's not like they're going to be firebombing Minneapolis. It's not going to happen in the same way, but what will happen—the appropriate model is not Germany or Japan but ancient Rome. It basically died from a thousand cuts.

VD: You pose the question: Who will take over for us, China or the European Union? Who would you say is the frontrunner right now? Could you see a third possibility, such as a Middle Eastern power, say Saudi Arabia, rising to take the place of the American Empire?

MB: I don't think that the Arab nations have it to get their act together. Those regimes are terribly corrupt. They also are very oppressive of their people. I think that the Arab nations will play... the role of the source of attrition that weakens us beyond belief and beyond repair. Their historic role is that they will be the thousand cuts that debilitate us.

While we're wasting all our money, time and energy fighting this shadow enemy, the money is piling up in China and the E.U. ... They're busy building their economies and doing the types of things that intelligent civilizations do. So, it's hard to know in that contest what will happen. But I have no doubt in my mind that by 2040 we will be taking our marching orders from other people.

Wise_owl says

Morris Berman second book expanding his thesis in regards a decline and end of American society is both interesting and, to use a cliche, thought provoking.

His central idea is that the core values and cultural assumptions that have developed in the US over the past two centuries have now, almost cyclically, become the very institutions that calcify America into an Empire and prevent it from avoiding what he sees as a cultural, economic and military decline, a 'Dark Age' as it were.

Some of Berman's work seems to rest in hyperbole. He obviously represents a certain cultural elite, and while careful to distance himself from certain charges of elitism, there are parts of the book where he takes as standard values that not all his readers may share. For example a discussion of his disdain for cell-phones without a discussion of their utility to the people who use them. This isn't to suggest these arguments are without merit. Indeed I think his broader points in regards how the hollowing out of the public sphere and the focus on the market as supreme generates what in the end fare horrible social values, rings very true.

His look at the foreign policy of the United States, how it evolved, how domestic concerns influence it, and how its actions become divorced from its citizenries understanding of those actions is pretty spot on. The Book looks at the historical developments of US relations with the middle east for example, and how support for Coup's, Dictators, Torture and mass-murder have lead to the complete degeneration of the American brand in those places. Also how the events of 9/11, far from being random, or acts of 'madness' logically follow in reaction to events orchestrated by the United States itself.

A good book, if not an excellent one, with an interesting thesis to consider. While there are particulars I disagree with Mr. Berman on, his general idea that the US has passed the Zenith of its influence and culture and is now on a downward spiral do seem to hold some merit.

Martin Rose says

It's essentially the non-fiction companion to the movie, *Idiocracy*. But seriously, while I say that somewhat in jest, it's not too far from the truth. It's an examination of our cultural, political, and social fabric, from our inner and outer lives, from the microcosm and the macrocosm. Berman covers impressive ground and gets to the root of something that's been bothering me likewise for some time -- that many of the ills we are experiencing in our modern world, exist, well, because we want them to. The notion that if only the common people would be exposed to the truth they would then take up a right cause and restore a more open and free republic to what it used to be, is at its heart, an idealist vision that is beyond realization.

This is worth the read, but if you're of a frantically optimistic type, this isn't for you; it has no easy, pre-packaged answers. As I have a good deal of friends who are writers, I often hear them deplore the industry they're in. They are horrified by the quality of work they find on the shelves. *Dark Ages America* provides the answer. We get the culture we want. We get the government we deserve.

This is supposed to be a review; I'll depart only briefly to explain that, I long ago came to this conclusion that Berman presents and found a lot of solace in the validation, be it of a bitter type. And there is only one answer to Berman's hair raising portrait of the American people -- if you are dissatisfied with the culture you find yourself in, *change it*. I realize that seems insurmountable, but honestly, did you have much else to do while the dark ages descends? Berman makes a compelling case that this too, is an impossibility. And that's probably the stark truth.

Clever readers, take note of the date of publication, as it makes a number of predictions and information even more interesting -- particularly in this age of spying scandals.

Mike says

Well, now it is true a lot of what Morris says; but how are we different than the Europeans? I mean, every time I've been there, the populace is just as hooked on shopping, cell phones, and other gadgets. We are all iSheep now; those who are going to suffer the most are the children today. Their standard of living will be nowhere near what their parent's was. But these doomsday books are getting so old; by that I mean the books that consistently refer to Americans as unaware and vapid, while Europeans are cultured and so intelligent. Crazy. Visit some of the places I have in the south of France, Spain and Italy; yeah, you'll see some cultured people there. Such a specious argument.

The US is headed for an important economic correction; when China and Japan stop buying our T-bills, there will be trouble. Those people (read: baby boomers) who think that social security and medicare will be there for them are fooling themselves. There is going to be pain. We'll make it, but be much more humbled. One good thing is that there won't be enough money for the US to play the world's policeman, finally Europe will have to pick up the pieces in garden spots like Bosnia, et. al.

Gary Schroeder says

If you pick up a book with a title like *Dark Ages America*, you pretty much know what you're going to get...and Berman delivers it in spades. When he wrote the book in 2006, there was a lot of evidence to support the idea that the American empire was paralleling late-phase Rome. The Iraq war was in full swing,

George W Bush had been re-elected, and Americans seemed uninterested in honestly addressing what was going on at home or what was being done in their name abroad. And this all before the market crash of 2008 and the election of Trump. It is, to say the least, a thoroughly depressing read...especially when you know what happened after the book was published. So, if you want to understand what's been happening culturally and politically in America for the last 50 years or so, this is the book for you. Just be prepared to be brought down. Way down.

Jamey says

This book is a good picture of an intelligent guy trying to understand what's happening in America without paying any attention to (1) the Kennedy Assassination, (2) US complicity in 9/11, (3) the peak of world oil production, (4) the narco-economy and Wall Street. To his credit, he does realize that the end of Bretton Woods was a big deal.

The book is also hobbled by a few persistent errors of grammar (John's dog was bigger than that of Bob's --- what the hell?).

His heart's in the right place, but he is the same cranky, adjective-driven writer he was in 1981 with "The Reenchantment of the World," which said that everything sucks here because we are all "alienated." True, but: duh.

Harry Allagree says

Towards the end of this second of a trilogy of books on the decline of the American empire, published in 2006, Berman writes: "In a word, Bush is us--or at least, a whole lot of us--and the scariness of this is not easy to digest. Given a population that embraces the collection of ideas, values, and policies that George W. Bush represents, how can a decline be avoided, or arrested? Where will a sane foreign policy come from, given the fact that neither he, nor the American people...are able to grasp the perfectly obvious bottom line, that 'they [the people of the Middle East] hate us because we don't even know why they hate us'"?

In describing what's wrong with the U.S., Berman quotes Salman Rushdie: "Rome did not fall because her armies weakened but because Romans forgot what being a Roman meant...O Dream-America, was civilization's quest to end in obesity and trivia...?" Berman holds that America, really since shortly after the Revolution, surely by 1800, began an inevitable decline through the lack of balance between virtue (the capacity of some to rise above private interests & ensure the good of the public) & reasonable economic profit through one's investments.

Berman outlines the status of the U.S. culture, as of 2006:

- a state of advanced cultural disintegration, spiritual death, through emptiness, alienation, violence & ignorance.
- compromised civil liberties & individual privacy through surveillance technology.
- transition from a nation of laws to a nation of men, without the objection of many citizens; e.g., the legalization of torture, the serious contemplation of canceling a presidential election, etc.
- the "war on terror" as a permanent state of war, without clear objective & without a specific enemy, largely caused by our centuries-long demeaning of Middle Eastern people out of imperial interests in their countries.

- an inability to rebound from past cyclical alternations because the nation lacks the courage to internally reassess our values and social structures, and to reverse patterns of deep social, economic & political polarization, especially of the last 30 years.

The author isn't totally without hope. He says: "I believe [Gore] Vidal is right: what we can count on are 'time's mystery and man's love of light'; and in this larger, more ethereal sense I suppose I am an optimist, for I believe that the human spirit does ultimately manage to prevail." In another place he says: "I am not one of those who can look at the coming Dark Age and say, 'Bring it on.' Reason is always worth fighting for because its opposite brings with it the end of freedom and a massive assault on the human spirit."

Berman's end-note is summarized in the following: "All in all, when we contemplate America's downward trajectory, it's rather difficult to imagine the nation's suddenly reversing course. This not a happy conclusion for me to come to, and in some ways, this has been a painful book to write...Those of us who now have different values from the country may have to look elsewhere for hope, quality, humanism, and--possibly--freedom."

Adam says

Well written and researched. However he has a few assumptions that support his conclusion which is still well proven. I disagree with him about his views of the unfettered free market being a part in America's decay. The free market and crony capitalism are mutually exclusive and our economy is centrally managed by government protected cartels, which is not the free market. In a free market we would have more choices than coke or pepsi, walmart or target. I also disagreed with him trying to assert that European socialism is all that great. He lacked any research whatsoever into how european social programs work or contrasting them to other systems. Granted he tried to keep the focus of his book on point but side assertions annoy me, personally. His lack of expertise or research in economic history bleeds through as he ignores the disappearance of the free market as government regulation began to protect entitled industrial influences from competition under the guise of mythological progressivism. I still give it a 5 because his conclusion is well argued and not dependent on his economic assertions. He draws from a variety of sources from the media, to academic studies to other knowledgeable authors to demonstrate that our decline is the product of choices past and present.

Amy Wolf says

Let me start out by saying that I am a born pessimist. Not only that, but I loathe the events that are taking place in present-day America: the deification of wealth; the spitting on the poor; the continued virulent racism; the NSA's regime of spying. Still, I did not entirely buy Berman's premise that this is the end of the country as we know it and that we are going to wind down the decades losing all sight of knowledge and devolving into brutes a la the real Dark Ages.

Berman cites other pundits for his argument, but he uses their broad assertions in lieu of actual statistics/facts. I could probably say that we're heading to a 2nd Renaissance and find enough talking/writing heads to support me. But mere repetition doth not a premise make.

The parallel with the Fall of Rome is compelling but ultimately unconvincing: the main reason was not so

much the Visigoths et al but the refusal of the populace to continue paying huge taxes to support the military. Soldiers didn't want to fight // end of Empire.

Berman's theory is interesting and certainly well worth a read. But this pessimist is going to err on the side of optimism by not building a survivalist shelter just yet. . .

Rob Shurmer says

Cultural and social historian Morris Berman exposes what many of us who still read have known all along, i.e. that the life of the mind in a mindless America has been drowned by a huge consumeristic fantasy. Arnold Toynbee observed that it is precisely in the declining phase of a civilization that it beats the drums of self-congratulation most fiercely. Similarly Berman points out that the dominant public voice in reaction to the destruction of our culture and civility is one of insistent celebration, which is exactly why there is no hope in avoiding the immanent collapse. In this globalized distopia, Berman argues that the repeal of the Bretton-Woods Agreement in 1971 set the stage for the current predatory economy, eroded real democracy, and destabilized the American empire both at home and abroad. The fact that this book was written prior to the scandals - legal, political, and economic - of the second Bush administration shows just how prescient, and frightening (to me at least), Berman's take on modern American 'life' is. "We are knee-deep in Orwellian waters, my friends," concludes Berman. "I don't think the future bodes well for our much transformed experiment in democracy."

Quite interestingly, Berman, convinced that the US is already in serious decline, posits that the EU, and not China, may be the next world hegemon in a generation. "Micky Mouse and Coka Cola will continue to have their allure...but in the end, the sheer sensibility of the European approach, its savvy internationalism, and perhaps more solid currency are going to look a lot better than American arrogance and violence.... [and] Europe may come closest to offering its citizens the best lifestyle currently available on the planet."

This is not an anti-Bush rant (though Berman gets his digs in), as 'W' is more symptom than cause, but rather a piece of personal catharsis by a modern Cicero who knows the end approacheth but will be damned to go under without pointing a finger at our own collective stupidity. And lest we forget the Roman pattern, by the time Caligula came along the rot had already taken hold.

Mina Lumiebre says

One of the best books I've read lately.

Author Morris Berman brings up some very disturbing points in "Dark Ages America (The Final Phase of Empire)." But we definitely need authors who disturb us, rather than pacify us. I want to be aware of what is really going on, I don't want to be a part of the problem.

This book was published in 2006 so it is a rather fresh look at American Culture and Society. I thought at first that this book would be nothing but a satirical dive into making fun of America and Americans, and I am quite pleased that this is not the case. There are far too many books and articles that only seem to make light of such subjects. This book is actually a very thorough and biting exercise in both observation and

psychology, served up cold. No witty stories to be told in this book. Just the truth.

The first thing I noted when I read through about fifty of the first pages, was that I finally felt like somebody understood.

A few things I always remember my father would say was that people in this country (and even Canada), tend to say things they don't mean. "They will say let's have dinner together one day" or "I'll call you" said my father, "and then they'll never call you." He said that people in this country, especially certain states like California, are filled with "the worst" people of them all, mostly because everyone who comes here is just about money, and ME, MYSELF, and I.

I always thought my father may have been bitter, but maybe he was right. I do find that many people in this country lack ability to be true friends. They want friends for the sole purpose of some self-aggrandizing, connections, "someone important to know," or something else. As Berman writes in his book, this country is all about "no free lunches" and "all about me." For instance, What can you do for me? The saying goes to imply that no good deed goes without another desired in return.

No one wants to spend time with you because they really care about you as a person deep down, it's all superficial. Co-workers and neighbours usually won't talk about anything except the weather or work. Else it's all about something else that's superficial, a vacation, a date on Saturday night.

Some quotes that haunted me from this book reveal not only the superficiality of this society, but its obsession with work, surrounding one's self with electronic gadgets like cell phones or a Bluetooth, and speed. Not speed the drug, but speed, the pace at which we push ourselves to work. All this hard work is admirable in some respects, but we take it too far. When is working so many hours enough? I understand, as Berman does, that some people need to work two jobs, or even three, to make it, but in sum, it's wearing us down to the point that we don't spend any time with family. I hardly know anybody who has time for family or hobbies. It's a choice for many of them. They want bigger and better things. They want that new BIG-SCREEN television, or they want that new degree that will add on to the other three they already have.

(What's odd is, they all complain about the double-shifts they work, but they choose to do so. It's second-nature for them. Why? Because they want the new tv!)

But satisfaction is never satiated by the new television or the degree. Sometimes, simplicity is best.

America is also becoming a land of uncaring. People in the shops, clerks, vendors, are both vapid and unwilling to go the extra mile to serve customers. Perhaps we cannot blame them, working minimum wage to sell stuff they can't even afford, but it's a sign of something apathetic brewing all the same. The society we live in is ruled by money and acquisition. It's "here today" and "gone tomorrow." The same goes for employment. Here today, gone somewhere else tomorrow. We're all ready to move on whenever the time is needed. It's a given in this country that at any given point in time, we're all going to be making job and career changes. We don't even question why we do this. Temps on the carousel. Workers on call. Working the night shift to make up for the part-time job that doesn't pay enough. It's a given in America, and we put up with this.

For what?

And the end result is that society becomes more cruel when we only care increasingly more about ourselves and advertising ourselves like a brand name of sorts. Employers and co-workers care less if you have to deal

with problems on the job. Hardly any response if any. Perhaps a lukewarm facade. Then nothing. No solutions to problems. Nobody really cares that much.

And neighbours are just the same. In his book, Berman recounts how a woman living in a condo was harassed by a neighbour for a long period of time, and the behaviour from her other neighbours was pure apathy. Reminds me of a situation that I heard of recently in my own town.

It's a dog eat dog society, it's an uncaring society, it's an apathetic society. And we all know that we could be fired for saying something that somebody doesn't like. We're just "things." Objects. Isn't it strange to think that other people view us in such a disposable and inhumane way? And worst of all, why are such uncaring and unempathetic people running our companies?

We all live under the threat of being pure "nobodies" because we're only a part of the chessgame, and we're not very valuable pieces in the game, even though everyone talks about being "team players."

Now, granted, I'm not talking about everyone here. I know that not all people are cruel or uncaring. Surely, I know that some of us are caring people who do want to improve the state of society and the world. I am just talking about "the norm." But if this is the norm, then this is quite disturbing in its own quiet yet desperate little way. As Berman puts it, we live in a "psychological slum."

The other part of this book deals mostly with the way the country is run both from an economic and political viewpoint. While these subjects I find rather dry, Berman writes very well and he makes his points easy to understand.

I would highly recommend that every person, whether American or not, read this book. It will enlighten anyone about the soul of America and why she is the way she appears to be.
